

BY MARY ALYS CHERRY

The Citizen was only a month old when the Clear Lake area was selected as the future site of NASA's Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center.

After President John F. Kennedy on May 25, 1961 laid out his goal to Congress to put a man on the moon by the end of the decade, the Space Task Group, named to lead America's manned spaceflight program, was formed with engineers at Langley Research Center in Hampton, Virginia.

In July 1961, National Aeronautical Space Agency (NASA) Administrator James E. Webb headed the site selection team, picking a site for America's human spaceflight program 25 miles southeast of Houston. Construction of the center, designed by Charles Luckman and on land donated by Rice University, began in April 1962, and the facility was officially opened for business in September 1963, after an open house that drew a crowd of 52,000 and a visit by President Kennedy.

When opened, the 1,620-acre facility, built by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, was originally called the Manned Spacecraft Center and was to be the primary center for U.S. space missions involving astronauts. It later was named the Lyndon B. Johnson Space Center in 1973.

Over the years, its Christopher Craft Mission Control Center has been instrumental in the success of every manned space mission. The Space Task Group, created on November 5, 1958 at Langley Center in Hampton, Virginia, was charged with overseeing the manned spaceflight program, which later became known as NASA.

Headed by Robert Gilruth, the group originally consisted of 45 people, including eight secretaries and "computers" (the term for women who ran calculations on mechanical adding machines). Of its 37 engineers, 27 were from Langley Research Center and 10 had been assigned from Lewis Research Center in Cleveland, Ohio. Original members of the group included Charles Donlan, Gilruth's deputy; Max Faget, head of engineering; Chuck Mathews, head of flight operations; Chris Kraft, also in flight operations; and Glynn Lunney, who at 21 was the youngest member of the group. The head of the public affairs office was John "Shorty" Powers.